

VZCZCXRO2530  
OO RUEHROV  
DE RUEHNR #0715/01 0981254  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 081254Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9120  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 6468  
RHMFISS/CJTJF HOA  
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000715

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL 04/08/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KE](#)  
SUBJECT: KIBAKI TOURS THE COUNTRY

Classified by: Ambassador Michael Ranneberger for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

¶1. (C) Since mid-March President Mwai Kibaki has been visiting different areas of the country. This appears to be an effort to enhance the President's credibility with the Kenyan people, given polls showing substantial dissatisfaction with the performance of the coalition government in implementing the reform process. During his appearances Kibaki has talked about his commitment to reform and to address the economic challenges facing the nation. He has been less than credible in grandfatherly-type reassurances that all will be well. Kibaki has nevertheless succeeded in looking presidential, particularly when contrasted with the recent public performances of Prime Minister Raila Odinga, who comes across more as a firefighter than a statesman, making pronouncements on a wide range of issues with little effect. Kibaki's vigorous tour of the country has also demonstrated, at age 78, his apparently good health. End Summary.

-----  
PROJECTING A NEW IMAGE  
-----

¶2. (C) President Mwai Kibaki has increased the number of public appearances he is making since mid-March, touring Rift Valley, Nyanza, and Western Provinces. Until these visits Kibaki had made only sporadic public appearances since the formation of the Grand Coalition government in April 2008. His absence from the public scene had fueled speculation about Kibaki's health and his grip on the government. His tour of the country seems calculated to promote an image of him as a hale and hearty leader; to dispel concerns that he is out of touch with ordinary Kenyans; to demonstrate commitment to the reform agenda; and to address the economic problems facing the nation. Interestingly, Kibaki's vigorous outreach comes in the wake of a reshuffle of State House personnel, with a new comptroller/chief of staff who is a political scientist. Although still often short on substance, his speeches are far better than they were before the shake-up.

¶3. (C) According a Member of Parliament (MP) from Kibaki's Party of National Unity, the President's new public relations approach is the result of the appointment in February of Nick Wanjohi as the President's Comptroller (Chief of Staff). Wanjohi, who previously worked as an adviser to Kibaki during the 2002 election campaign, replaced Hyslop Ipu, who was reassigned after clashing with First Lady Lucy Kibaki over her involvement in state affairs.

(Note: Lucy Kibaki has long been considered a liability due to her erratic and at times violent behavior toward anyone who has affronted her. Although Ipu was relieved of his duties, the President simultaneously stopped working from his residence at State House and instead began using his parliamentary office at Harambee House, thereby limiting Lucy Kibaki's ability to influence government matters. End Note.) According to the MP, it was Wanjohi who persuaded Kibaki to increase his public appearances, and to reach out to Rift Valley, Nyanza, and

Western Provinces, which are strongholds of Prime Minister Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement. Wanjohi has also persuaded Kibaki to relax his preference for formal dress in an effort to make him appear closer to the people.

-----  
THE KIBAKI ROAD SHOW  
-----

14. (C) Over the past three weeks Kibaki has visited Rift Valley, Nyanza, and Western Provinces. In each visit, he has undertaken a strenuous program, meeting with multiple crowds each day. He has used the visits to re-insert himself into the daily affairs of the nation. For example, on March 17 he visited Kisiiland in Rift Valley and used the occasion to urge Kenyans to shun tribalism. He emphasized that the Grand Coalition government is committed to reform. The President has also sent notice to disgruntled Cabinet ministers that they need to stop squabbling or, in consultation with the Prime Minister, he will sack them. Kibaki continued to Nyanza Province the same day and delivered much the same message. The following week, he made a two-day working visit to Western Province, where he met with senior provincial officials and addressed several rallies. The media covered these visits extensively and gave positive marks to Kibaki. He looked strong and alert, partially dispelling the rumors and health concerns that are bound to exist for a 78 year-old man like Kibaki. We expect the Kibaki road show to continue.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

15. (C) Kibaki's recent tour has demonstrated his physical and

NAIROBI 00000715 002 OF 002

intellectual health, but has not necessarily enhanced his credibility with the Kenyan people. He has been long on rhetoric and short on specifics at a time when Kenyans are increasingly skeptical about the coalition government's commitment to the reform agenda and greatly concerned about serious economic problems. The public relations campaign managed by Kibaki's team, while less than convincing to many Kenyans, nevertheless stands in stark contrast with Prime Minister Odinga's sputtering public profile. Odinga has recently addressed issues in a haphazard manner, making him appear more as a firefighter than a statesman. He has also made statements that portray him as impotent to exercise his prerogative to coordinate and supervise government. End Comment.

RANNEBERGER